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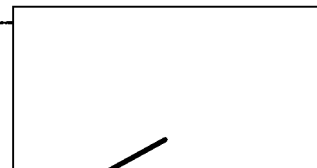
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Latin America

Colombia

*Coca
Eradication
is Slowgoing*

[redacted] Colombian coca eradication for 1996 lags far behind last year's efforts. For the first six months of the year, the Colombian National Police (CNP) claim to have sprayed only about 1,500 hectares—compared to claims last year of 9,962 hectares for the same time period.

- *A dearth of spray operations in the Guaviare growing region, while pilots were being trained in new straight line spray tactics, is largely responsible for the drugs.*
- Also, [redacted] inclement weather and the new straight line spray tactics have reduced the effectiveness of herbicide application to only about 20 percent, *which, if true, would result in the effective eradication of only about 300 hectares.* [redacted]

The CNP reports great frustration with the new tactics. [redacted]
[redacted] the new tactics have failed to diminish the incidents of ground-fired attacks against the spray aircraft and have forced the aircraft to fly longer distances, resulting in fewer hectares sprayed and higher fuel consumption; and limited operations against smaller and more dispersed fields. [redacted]

More recently, however, in an attempt to wipe out coca cultivation and cocaine processing in the Guaviare, DANTI personnel and the Colombian Army's second mobile brigade launched in late June their first joint operation, dubbed "Operation Conquest I," into Miraflores and the surrounding area, the heart of Colombia's coca cultivation and a guerrilla stronghold. *The army was able to successfully secure the Miraflores airstrip, thus providing spray aircraft a needed refueling base and holding some promise for increasing coca eradication.* [redacted] about 2,000 hectares of coca were sprayed by mid-July until mounting security concerns caused eradication operations in the area to cease.

- According to press [redacted] several thousand coca growers in the Guaviare have staged protests against the government's crop eradication effort and its designation of the

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department as a "public order zone," which severely limits the sale and shipment of items critical to the production of cocaine. Recent clashes between government personnel and protesters near San Jose forced the CNP to remove the spray aircraft to a more secure location. *This move takes the T-65 spray aircraft out of effective operating range, thus essentially halting aerial coca eradication throughout the Guaviare.* []

In early July, a follow-on operation, "Conquest II," was launched into the Putumayo and Caqueta Departments. *However, security distractions in the Guaviare—such as ongoing peasant protests—will probably limit its success.* Also, the limited number of spray aircraft to support follow-on operations in the Putumayo and Caqueta Departments has forced the redeployment of spray planes from the primary opium poppy base at Neiva, Huila Department, thereby virtually shutting down opium poppy eradication, according to Embassy reporting. []

The launching of these operations into areas that have rarely, if ever, seen eradication spray aircraft is probably a morale booster for the Colombian police and army troops and is a first step toward more joint operations. Long-term operational sustainability, however, will be difficult because of security concerns and limited resources, and coca eradication will almost certainly continue to be slow. []

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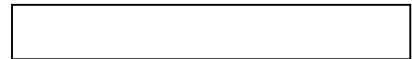
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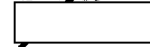
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